

Navy Yard

Bounded by M Street on the north,  
Eleventh Street, S.E. on the east,  
Anacostia River on the south, and  
First Street, S.E. on the west  
Washington  
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-442

HABS  
DC,  
WASH,  
74C-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
MID-ATLANTIC REGION NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

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DC,  
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## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

NAVY YARD

HABS No. DC-442

The Washington Navy Yard is located in Southeast Washington on the north shore of the Anacostia River, approximately 5000 feet above the confluence of the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers. It is comprised of two sections including the Washington Navy Yard Historic District, owned and utilized by the Department of the Navy, and the Washington Navy Yard Annex Historic District, owned and operated by the General Services Administration (Figure 1.1).

### Washington Navy Yard Historic District

The Washington Navy Yard Historic District is bounded by 9th Street, SE, M Street, SE, the Anacostia River, and Isaac Hull Avenue. With the exception of land running for approximately 80 feet west of Isaac Hull Avenue, the District includes the original 12-acre Navy Yard of 1799.

The Joint Committee on Landmarks has designated the Washington Navy Yard Historic Precinct a Category II Landmark of importance which contributes significantly to the cultural heritage and visual beauty of the District of Columbia. It has also been nominated for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

Established in 1799, the Washington Navy Yard was one of the United States' first naval yards. It was the Country's primary navy yard until 1815, and later in the nineteenth century, it became the center for naval ordnance research and production. The Navy Yard also has an important place in Washington's local history. It is the southern terminus for L'Enfant's Eighth Street (East) Axis, and was one of the City's few important nineteenth century manufacturing establishments.

In 1803, the Washington Navy Yard was designated by Jefferson as the home port for the United States Navy and the

depository for all vessels in ordinary. Subsequent to this, interest in the Yard resulted in the transformation of the swampy area surrounding the yard to a substantial establishment in 1814. Largely under the guidance of the 1804 City Plan by Benjamin Latrobe, officer's quarters and several large industrial buildings and storehouses were constructed from 1804 to 1814.

Much of the Navy Yard was subsequently destroyed in 1814 when the Yard's commandant set fire to it, rather than permit it to be taken by the British during the War of 1812. In 1875, naval repair operations were transferred to Norfolk, considered to have a more suitable harbor. The Navy Yard was then developed as an industrial facility.

In the 1840's and 1850's, the facilities at the Yard were expanded, with several large industrial buildings forming a quadrangle. These include present buildings #33, #36, #46, and a one-story, L-shaped brick structure more than 400 feet long.

In 1886, all of the Navy Yard shops were turned over to the production of ordnance in response to an 1884 decision to establish the United States Naval Gun Factory at the Washington Navy Yard. The specialization of the Yard's activities in manufacturing resulted in a growing importance of the central portion of the Yard rather than the waterfront. The Yard became the most important manufacturing establishment of nineteenth-century Washington.

Ordnance production and experiments continued at the Navy Yard until 1962, when the weapons plant was closed. In the following year, the Yard's 60.5 western acres were transferred to the General Services Administration. Since that time, the Yard has been primarily a naval administrative center. A 1966 Development Plan proposed strengthening this role as well as creating an historic precinct in the Yard's center which would preserve many of its historic buildings for use as officers' quarters and as a United States Navy Museum. Current recommendations recognize that while it would be unreasonable to preserve all of the Yard's historic buildings, it is essential that a sufficient number be retained to preserve the area's nineteenth century flavor.

## Washington Navy Yard Annex Historic District

The Washington Navy Yard Annex of the Washington Naval Station is to the west of, and adjacent to, the Washington Navy Yard Historic District (Figure 1.2). Its boundaries are M Street on the north, Isaac Hull Avenue on the east, the Anacostia River on the south and First Street, S.E. on the west. It is owned by the General Services Administration, with the exception of Buildings 116 and 118, which are still owned by the Navy. The Western Annex in its entirety has been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

The Washington Navy Yard Annex is an industrial district, which today includes an area of approximately 60.5 acres. It consists of eleven major industrial buildings (Numbers 74, 137, 158, 159, 159E, 160, 167, 173, 187, 197, 202) (Figure 1.1) and four minor ones, several sites where former buildings stood, roads between and around the various buildings, several parking lots, a coal pit, and one remaining exterior crane runway originally used for hoisting and moving huge ordnance. Two major types of buildings are represented in the Annex. One is a multi-story manufacturing building of early concrete post-and-beam construction; the other is a foundry-type building with large, uninterrupted interior space created by the use of an interior steel frame and long-span roof trusses.

The Western Annex is identified with the production of heavy ordnance for the U.S. Navy during the 20th Century. Building first began in the Annex during the Spanish-American War (1898-1899) when the original Navy Yard boundary was extended west to 4th Street and Buildings 116 and 118, the Electric Power House and Boiler House, were erected. By 1919, the Annex was almost completely developed, with extension of the western boundary of the Yard to 2nd Street, S.E.

The primary significance of the Western Yard Annex rests on the production of huge tubes of the 16-inch guns used on naval vessels of World Wars I and II. The guns represented the coupling of technological innovations introduced in ordnance research in the Navy Yard by Rodman and

<sup>1</sup>Excerpted from the "Request for Determination of Eligibility to the National Register of Historic Places for the Washington Navy Yard Annex (GS-03B-69007)," by the General Services Administration, November, 1976.

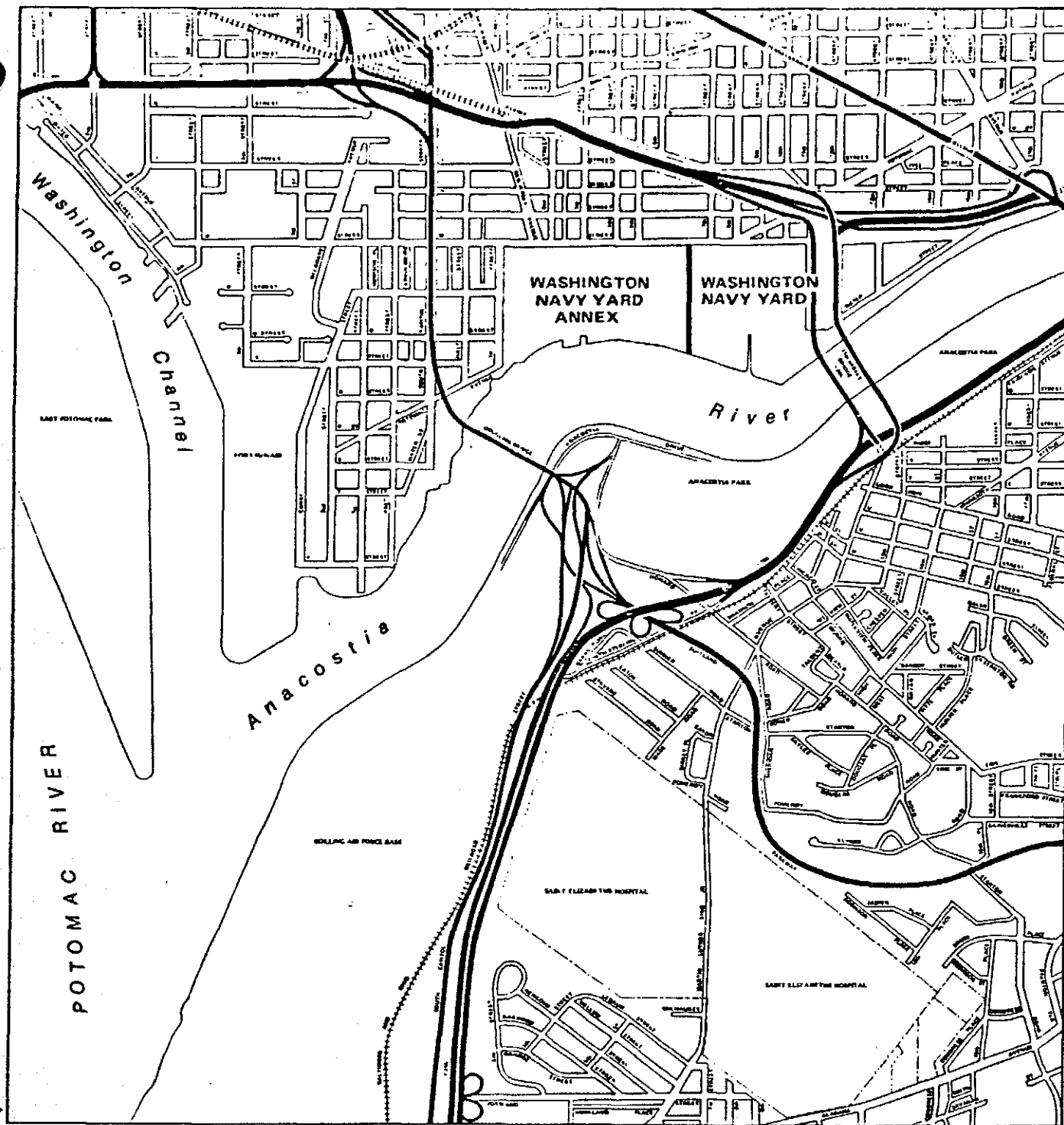
Dahlgren and others with the metallurgical improvements stimulated by Navy demand. Building 153, now demolished, was used primarily for production of the guns, and contained the large shrinkage pits used in their manufacture. Yard records indicate that other operations such as the mounting, assembling, and equipping of the guns was accomplished primarily in Buildings 197 and 202. Contemporary accounts also link Buildings 159 and 160 with production of the guns, as well as other buildings in the main Navy Yard and its eastern addition.

The architectural or physical significance of the Western Annex is secondary to the importance of its industrial history. Certain individual buildings have architectural or engineering significance.<sup>1</sup> However, the Yard as a whole presently lacks the kind of range of architectural types or cohesive architectural quality which would distinguish it as an architecturally significant district.<sup>2</sup> Examples of each of the two building types which once existed in the Annex, the steel frame foundry and concrete frame manufacturing types, remain. Most of the service and storage buildings for the Yard and the large exterior cranes have been removed, although most of the railroad tracks which were important linkages between the buildings have only been covered with pavement. In addition, the single building of primary architectural as well as functional significance, Building 153, has been demolished.

Thus, it is the production of the 16-inch 50 caliber gun and the association with the development of its original model which give Building 153, in particular, and the Western Annex, in general, its historical significance. Today, however, the Western Annex is only a partial representation of the Yard at the peak of its wartime production. It has been compromised by alteration and demolition to such an extent that the District as a whole no longer directly represents that process. Since World War II, post-war weapons development in missiles and electronic equipment have in fact led to the gradual obsolescence of earlier production activities and of the buildings in the Navy Yard Annex. In 1962, the Annex was transferred to the General Services Administration (GSA). Current planning for GSA now suggests that the area may be developed as a federal employment center.

<sup>1</sup>General Services Administration. "Request for Determination of Eligibility to the National Register of Historic Places for the Washington Navy Yard Annex (GS-03B-69007)." November 1976.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



WASHINGTON NAVY YARD AND  
WASHINGTON NAVY YARD ANNEX



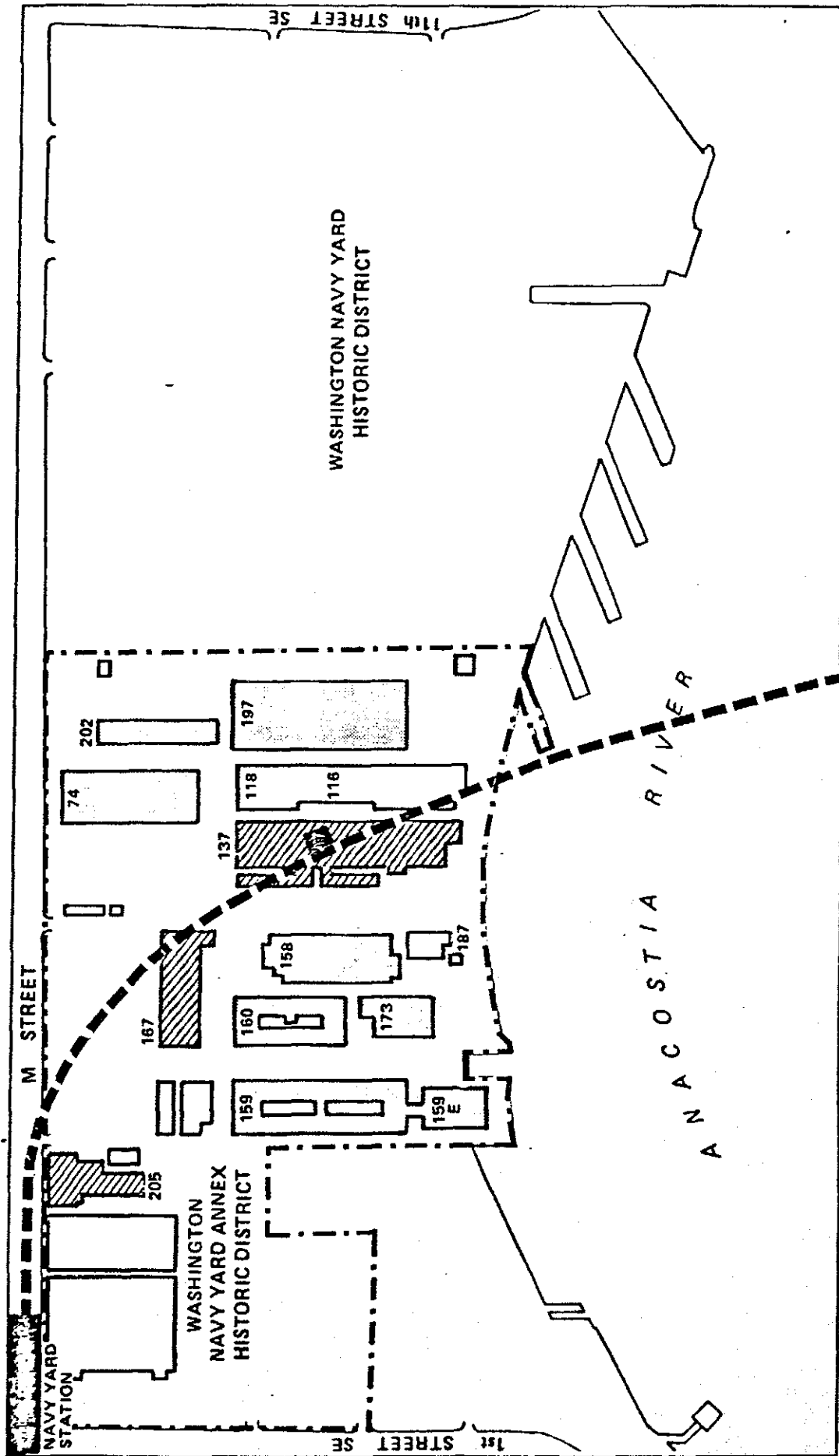


FIGURE 1.2: WASHINGTON NAVY YARD ANNEX & WASHINGTON NAVY HISTORIC DISTRICTS

